

# ALL JUST CLICKBAIT?

## The effect of empathy and epistemic emotions in online news on the eudaimonic entertainment experience and political information processing.

Dietrich, F., Kugler, T., Hennings, S., Conrad, C., Schneider, F. M., & Vorderer, P.

### Theoretical Background

International, radical decline in sales of print newspapers (Barthel, 2019; Schröder, 2020)

Publishers compete for attention with more entertaining content in the online world

**Consequently, journalists include emotionalizing elements in news reporting** (Reinemann et al., 2012)

**Is this harmful for deliberation of political topics and the informed citizen?**

In addition to often discussed escapist motives, entertainment consumption can also be driven by “truth-seeking” motivations that prompt more elaborate forms of processing (The dual-process model of entertainment experience and motivated cognition; Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; also Schneider et al., 2021)

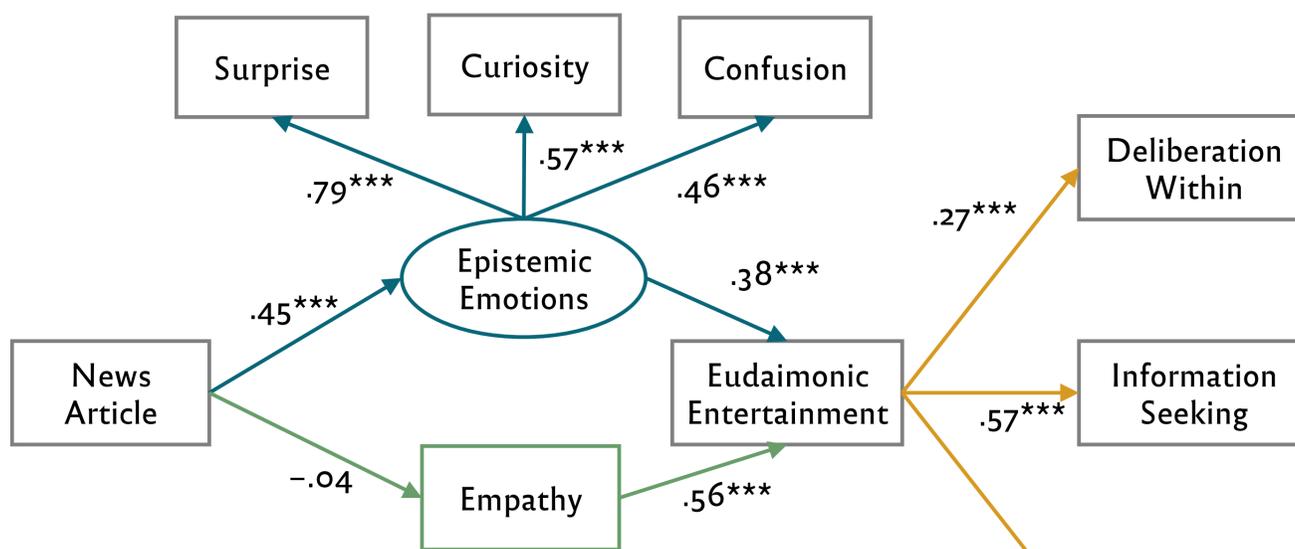
### Hypotheses

**H1:** If a newspaper article elicits readers' empathy with the persons portrayed in the article, the readers experience more eudaimonic entertainment compared to when they feel less empathy.

**H2:** If a newspaper article simultaneously triggers the epistemic emotions of surprise, curiosity, and confusion, the eudaimonic entertainment experience will be stronger compared to an emotionally neutral newspaper article.

**H3:** Higher eudaimonic entertainment experience of the readers is associated with (a) higher deliberation within, (b) more information seeking, and (c) more knowledge about the topic.

### Results



Note. Structural equation model ( $N = 372$ ) with standardized coefficients. Robust  $\chi^2 = 526.46$ ,  $df = 241$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.18$ , robust CFI = 0.921, robust RMSEA = 0.056, 90% CI of robust RMSEA [0.050, 0.063], SRMR = 0.076. Indirect effect of epistemic emotions treatment on eudaimonic entertainment experience via perceived epistemic emotions,  $\gamma = 0.58$ ,  $p < .001$ , Monte Carlo simulated 95% CI [0.327, 0.885].

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

### Method

3x1 between-subjects online experiment

407 participants (after exclusions,  $N = 372$ ; 72% female;  $M_{age} = 26.00$ ;  $SD_{age} = 8.91$ )

#### Measures:

- Epistemic Emotions (Vogl et al., 2018)
- State Empathy (Shen, 2010)
- Entertainment Experience (Schneider et al., 2019)
- Deliberation Within (Weinmann, 2018)
- Information Seeking (Yang & Kahlor, 2013)
- Knowledge about the topic (knowledge questions)

#### Manipulation:

Participants read a news article about one of two political topics (climate change; black lives matter movement)

**Empathy:** Articles emphasized human strokes of fate

**Epistemic Emotions:** Articles included quizzes to evoke high confidence errors

**Control:** Articles conveyed facts about the given topic

### Discussion

Emotionalizing news content can elicit elaborate information processing and more knowledge about political topics. However, we could only induce epistemic emotions with our manipulation. Other modalities (e.g., AV news content) might be more effective to induce emotions such as empathy (Lench et al., 2011).

Besides empathy, epistemic emotions are a noteworthy predictor of eudaimonic entertainment experience, extending the current state of knowledge in entertainment research.

If employed in the right way, interactive elements of online news can increase elaborate information processing and eudaimonic entertainment experience, contradicting previous research that found multimedia interactivity to be obstructive for learning (e.g., Sundar, 2000).

### References

- Barthel, M. (2019, July 9). Trends and facts on newspapers: State of the news media. *Pew Research Center's Journalism Project*. <https://www.journalism.org/fact-sheet/newspapers/>
- Bartsch, A., & Schneider, F. M. (2014). Entertainment and politics revisited: How non-escapist forms of entertainment can stimulate political interest and information seeking. *Journal of Communication*, 64(3), 369–396. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12095>
- Lench, H. C., Flores, S. A., & Bench, S. W. (2011). Discrete emotions predict changes in cognition, judgment, behavior, and physiology: A meta-analysis of experimental emotion elicitation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 137(5), 834–855. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024244>
- Reinemann, C., Stanyer, J., Scherr, S., & Legnante, G. (2012). Hard and soft news: A review of concepts, operationalizations and key findings. *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*, 13(2), 221–239. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14748484911427803>
- Schneider, F. M., Bartsch, A., & Leonhard, L. (2021). An extended dual-process model of entertainment effects on political information processing and engagement. In P. Vorderer & C. Klimmt (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Entertainment Theory* (pp. 536–557). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/978019072216.013.29>
- Schneider, F. M., Bartsch, A., & Oliver, M. B. (2019). Factorial validity and measurement invariance of the appreciation, fun, and suspense scales across US-American and German samples. *Journal of Media Psychology*, 31(3), 149–156. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-1105/a000236>
- Schröder, J. (2020, January 17). Die Auflagen-Bilanz der Tages- und Wochenzeitungen [The circulation balance of daily and weekly newspapers]. *Meedia*. <https://meedia.de/2020/01/17/die-auflagen-bilanz-der-tages-und-wochenzeitungen-bild-und-welt-verlieren-erneuer-mehr-als-10-die-zeit-legt-dank-massivem-digital-plus-zu/>
- Shen, L. (2010). On a scale of state empathy during message processing. *Western Journal of Communication*, 74(5), 504–524. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2010.512278>
- Sundar, S. S. (2000). Multimedia effects on processing and perception of online news: A study of picture, audio, and video downloads. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 77(3), 480–499. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10776900007700302>
- Vogl, E., Pekrun, R., & Muis, K. R. (2018). Validierung eines deutschsprachigen Instruments zur Messung epistemischer Emotionen: Die Epistemic Emotion Scales – Deutsch (EES-D) [Validation of a German language instrument for measuring epistemic emotions: The Epistemic Emotion Scales – German (EES-D)]. In G. Hagenauer & T. Hascher (Eds.), *Emotionen und Emotionsregulation in Schule und Hochschule [Emotions and emotion regulation in schools and universities]* (pp. 259–272). Waxmann.
- Weinmann, C. (2018). Measuring political thinking: Development and validation of a scale for “deliberation within.” *Political Psychology*, 39(2), 365–380. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12423>
- Yang, Z. J., & Kahlor, L. (2013). What, me worry? The role of affect in information seeking and avoidance. *Science Communication*, 35(2), 189–212. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1075547012441873>